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UNMASKING TERRORISM

COUNTERING THE THREAT OF TERRORISM

Rushworth M. Kidder

European Community nations aren't selling any more surplus butter to Libya.

Business executives abroad are turning in their highly visible limousines for modest sedans. Engineers in Massachusetts are developing a "sniffer" that can detect even the tiniest scent of explosives. United States Army bases in Germany are being guarded against intruders by loud-honking geese.

In these and other ways, Western nations are learning to counter the threat of international terrorism.

But terrorist attacks are on the rise worldwide. And few terrorists have been brought to justice. A report from the Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies at Tel Aviv University in Israel notes that terrorists were captured or killed in action in only about 1 of every 10 incidents in 1984.

Authorities on terrorism generally reject the notion that terrorism can be wiped out entirely. For the immediate future, they see it as a problem to be managed, not solved. But they insist that much more can be done to control it.

From scores of interviews with terrorist experts in recent months, the following broad conclusions emerge about countering terrorism:

Diplomatic measures

"The single most important step," says Italian authority Franco Ferracuti, "is international cooperation." But such cooperation is difficult, he cautions, because nations have different traditions, laws, and economies. Intelligence services hesitate to share information, fearing leaks abroad. Courts are concerned that extradition could help bring a foreign government's political enemies home for punishment. Politicians fear that sanctions against nations backing terrorism could disadvantage their own economies.

There are differences, too, in the definition of terrorism. European nations, with a history of domestic terrorism, tend to see it as a criminal problem. But Israel, which is at war with its Arab neighbors, sees it as a form of warfare demanding a military response — a view increasingly prevalent in America.

An international consensus is growing, however, about ways to deal with the problem. For example: the six-point statement issued earlier this month by the heads of the seven industrial nations at the Tokyo summit. Galvanized by the US bombing of Libya April 15 and the European Community decision April 21 to impose sanctions against Libya, summit leaders agreed to ban arms sales to terrorist-sponsoring nations, deny entry to suspected terrorists, improve extradition procedures, impose tougher immigration and visa requirements, and improve cooperation among security organizations.

They also agreed to impose size limits on diplomatic staffs from offending nations. Since the US bombing of Libya, Libyans have been expelled from Britain, West Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Denmark, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg.

Experts, in fact, pinpoint embassies and consulates as an essential link in the terrorism support system. "The European Community generally has been far too weak in using its rights under the Vienna Convention," says Paul Wilkinson of the University of Aberdeen.

That convention, dating from 1815, establishes rules concerning diplomatic immunity and the diplomatic pouch. Under those protections, Libya, Iran, Syria, and other terrorist-sponsoring nations have harbored terrorists, stored and transported weapons, provided false documents, and operated networks of agents ready to commit terrorist acts within a host country. There are increasing calls for rethinking these provisions.

Intelligence gathering

"The only effective way of beating terrorist activities," says Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) assistant director Oliver (Buck) Revell, "is to have intelligence on their operations, their organizations, their membership, their motives, their philosophies, their ideology."

The word intelligence, however, is an umbrella for everything from a whispered comment to a supercomputer.

It covers an informer's tip in September 1984 that the Valhalla, a 77-foot trawler, would shortly leave Boston carrying seven tons of arms destined for Irish Republican Army (IRA) terrorists. It also covers the US spy satellites and British Royal Air Force Nimrod aircraft that tracked the ship and the transfer of arms to an Irish boat, the Marita Ann, before the Irish Navy made the interception.

Most observers agree that effective counterterrorism requires human intelligence gathering — and that overemphasis on electronic means has hampered efforts to build an effective network of human agents. Because of emphasis on the use of computers, says Reinhard Rupprecht of West Germany's Ministry of the Interior, "we are in danger of neglecting the police on the beat."

But since terrorist organizations tend to be small and highly secretive, some of the best leads come from the simplest measures. "You pay a lot of little ladies to keep their ears and eyes open [and] to send you information," says former Central Intelligence Agency chief Stansfield Turner. "The false alarm rate will be tremendous," he adds. "Hopefully, we're skilled in sifting data."

Some of that sifting is now being done through Interpol, whose central computer facility in Paris is proving useful in tracking the movements of terrorists and weapons.

Security measures

From his office in Rome, Judge Rosario Priore can look out his window at the Tiber River — through

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MANIPULATION OF THE MEDIA

Rushworth M. Kidder

Belfast

He was out with guests at a restaurant late one evening when the phone call found him.

Rushing back to his office, James Hawthorne, head of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) for Northern Ireland, was met by a slightly white-faced senior editor. The message: A correspondent had just gotten an interview with Evelyn Glenholmes. The question: Should the BBC broadcast it?

Some news executives would instantly have said "Yes!" Ms. Glenholmes was a hot property, a prime suspect in the attempted assassination of British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher by the Irish Republican Army (IRA) at a Brighton hotel in 1984. Glenholmes had gone underground. Getting her on tape was something of a coup.

But under Britain's Prevention of Terrorism Act, the IRA is an illegal organization. Broadcasting Glenholmes's words might entangle the BBC in legal considerations. Here in Northern Ireland, only the finest of lines separates reporting on terrorism (which is legal) from providing a propaganda platform for terrorists (which is not).

Which was it here? When BBC correspondent Anne Cadwallader had been approached in Dublin by several IRA members, she didn't have time to call Belfast for advice. Her instincts told her to go with them in their car. She was hooded and taken to a house somewhere in Dublin, where she met a young woman who said her name was Evelyn Glenholmes.

Listening to the tape later, Mr. Hawthorne heard a woman's voice protesting her innocence. Was it really Glenholmes? The Dublin correspondent could not have been expected to recognize her. Even if authentic — and even if legal — would the broadcast stir up a hornet's nest of criticism?

In such a case, says Hawthorne, the news executive has to make "a very, very careful judgment as to where this inherently difficult decision is going to land [him] with public relations and the reputation of the BBC."

"I had a gut feeling that it was proper to do it — an instinct that this was *real* news. I made that decision between 1 a.m. and 3 a.m." Then Hawthorne did his legal duty: He phoned the relevant authorities at 3 a.m. — knowing he would get only a duty officer who would have to wait until morning to refer the information higher — and went home. The story went out with the first morning news.

Is it news or terrorist propaganda?

In the fast-paced world of breaking news, even such apparently simple stories can involve agonizing decisions. Yet when such stories do go out, what is their effect?

Do they contribute to the free marketplace of ideas, helping the citizenry to understand the central issues of their day? Or do they give terrorists a megaphone through which to spread their message of fear to their ultimate target — the public at large?

Do the news media, in Mrs. Thatcher's words, provide "the oxygen of publicity" on which terrorism thrives? Or do they in Hawthorne's words, "allow people of the most seditious views to speak them," so that in the end "they don't have to express them in the hard way?"

Does extensive media coverage lead to what Jerrold M. Post, a psychiatrist with Defense Systems Inc., in Washington, D.C., calls a "Robinhoodization" of the terrorists, inflating them to the proportion of folk heroes? Or does such coverage produce what Paul Wilkinson, a terrorism authority at the University of Aberdeen in Scotland, calls "the outrage effect" — public revulsion of terrorist acts and demands for tougher governmental measures?

Does journalism interfere with official efforts to resolve crises, either by giving away essential information or, as Die Zeit political editor Dieter Buhl notes, by putting "so much pressure on the government" that it acts without due care? Or does it provide needed information to officials, since in hostile situations reporters can sometimes go where government decisionmakers cannot?

Finally, are the media hooked on terrorism? "Terrorism is drama," says Noel Koch, who oversees the Pentagon's counterterrorism efforts. "It's got suspense, it's got grievance, it's got people at risk, it's got the families that are crying; you can't duplicate it in fiction."

So do the media, in an effort to captivate viewers, turn to terrorist incidents whenever possible? Or do they simply report what they find, and try hard, as Alan Protheroe, assistant director general of the BBC, says, to do it "responsibly, accurately, with total care, and with total fairness in the things that [we] do not advocate"?

On these and other points there are vehement disagreements, not only among students of terrorism but within the broader public. On three points, however, there is basic consensus:

- Television is the terrorist's medium of choice. It is far preferable to print or radio as the outlet with the most immediacy and the most terrifying impact.
- Television is no longer simply reporting *about* the story: It has become *part of* the story. Making that point, Lawrence K. Grossman, president of NBC, calls television "the stage on which terrorist incidents are played."
- In the never-ending debate about the role of the news media in a free democracy, television is at the center of an ongoing controversy — and terrorism is Exhibit A.

Terrorists' growing media skills

Paul Nahon, news director at France's second television channel, Antenne-2, has a front-seat view of the terrorists' news-management skills. One of his four-man camera crews is being held hostage in Lebanon. The terrorists have colleagues in France who monitor everything said about the situation and pass it back to the captors.

In deciding how to cover the story, he says, "we have to be very, very careful every day. [The terrorists] are managing all this like professionals — professional politics, professional dramatism."

One of the noticeable developments in recent years, in fact, lies in the increasingly skillful use of publicity by

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terrorist organizations. "The vice-president for media relations," says Dr. Post, referring only half in jest to the individual within nearly every terrorist group who orchestrates media coverage.

With the growth of inexpensive videotape equipment, these groups are increasingly able to provide news organizations with television-ready footage: messages from terrorist leaders, interviews with captives, and even (in the case of British journalist Alec Collett, who disappeared in Lebanon in March 1985) visual records of executions.

Yasser Arafat's Palestine Liberation Organization now owns a share in an Arab communications satellite, leading one observer to wonder whether the world will soon see a new network, "Television Arafat."

And, as last summer's hijacking of TWA Flight 847 in Beirut showed, terrorists are getting very good at organizing press conferences and handling requests for interviews: A tour of the plane was reportedly offered to the networks for $1,000, and a session with the hostages themselves could be had for $12,500.

While NBC's Mr. Grossman likes to recount figures from a Gallup poll showing that 89 percent of Americans applauded television's coverage of the TWA incident, other observers, especially overseas, where television coverage is more understated, are less approving. "What [the American] media did in Lebanon during the TWA hijacking was disastrous," says Hans Josef Horchem, former head of West German domestic security and a recognized expert on counterterrorism. "It not only hurt the interests of the security forces, it was a question of taste."

In retrospect, says Ari Rath, editor of the Jerusalem Post, the TWA incident "is probably a very good example of very sophisticated use by hijackers and terrorists of the media."

To report or not to report

Mr. Rath, who like all other Israeli editors operates under a carefully organized form of governmental censorship, feels the tug between journalist and citizen.

"When you work as an Israeli journalist, you also have the other part in you, and that is your security awareness." He cites an example of a terrorist bombing several years ago that made use of a new method: a bicycle frame filled with TNT. When his paper reported how the bomb was made, the censor chastised him, showing point by point how his article had hindered both immediate and long-term police work. "It was an eye-opener," says Rath, who remains persuaded that his paper did the wrong thing. "One could have given a very good and grim and realistic description of that particular bombing incident without giving away some details which really did harm the investigation."

"What is more important," muses Rath, "to have the one-time scoop or save lives?"

Should the media, then, not publicize full details of terrorist incidents? Ambassador Robert B. Oakley, director of the US State Department's Office of Counter-Terrorism and Emergency Planning, thinks not. "There's a long history of what you might call copycatism [and] competitiveness, [especially] among Middle East terrorist groups."

His point was substantiated when the Feb. 28 assassination of Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme was followed less than 36 hours later by the assassination of Zafer Masri, the mayor of the West Bank city of Nablus, under almost identical circumstances.

Observers also call attention to the news media's reporting of counterterrorism measures taken by security forces. During the siege of the Iranian Embassy in London in 1980, recalls the BBC's Mr. Protheroe, journalists were puzzled when a Thames Gas Board van came through police cordons, parked very close to the building, and produced several men with jackhammers who drilled up the street.

At the time, journalists were told it was to shut off the gas in case of an explosion. Later, they learned that the jackhammers provided noise cover for the Special Air Service commandos, who were drilling peepholes through the embassy walls from the building next door.

"I think you've got to report that," says Protheroe, although he would not want it reported while the incident was under way. His reason: to keep the electorate as fully informed as possible.

Censorship vs. self-regulation

Throughout the debate on the media's role, one call stands out: the need for journalistic self-regulation and not censorship. First, censorship would clearly violate one of the treasured cornerstones of democracy: a free press. "One of the biggest victories terrorists could ever achieve," notes NBC's Grossman, "would be to force democracies to adopt the repressive press restrictions of dictatorships."

But there is a second and more subtle reason: Given the pace of today's technology, censorship simply would not work. The anticipated threat: satellite television, beamed from any part of the world and receivable by viewers anywhere. In Europe, where some of the state-run television networks have worked out (1) fairly high standards of taste and (2) agreements with national security forces to withhold or delay broadcasts in certain cases, there is broad concern about the effect of general access to the major US networks.

If European television had to face pressure from American television, says Peter Goebel of West Germany's second television channel, ZDF, "I'm almost sure [the European stations] won't be able to keep their principles."

Nachman Shai, director of Israeli Army Radio and a former television journalist, finds the situation doubly difficult in Israel, where foreign television crews are a constant presence. However much Israeli journalists might choose not to broadcast certain pictures, he says, "there is such competition it is almost impossible to stop pictures from getting out."

Is such competition good or bad? How free should the media be? Again, there is serious disagreement.

"The disadvantages of the public not being accurately informed, or being informed only by administration spokesman, are too severe in our society," says former Central Intelligence Agency chief Stansfield Turner. "While I decry the media releasing secrets as much as they do, I would never think of trying to organize a government censorship bureau."

But Rand Corporation scholar Paul B. Henze sees a need for greater controls on the media. "What has been gained by all of the minute media reporting on terrorism? Whose interests have been served? Who has learned something? I find it very hard to think very readily of what good has been done by just simply tantalizing people."

But, putting the problem in another perspective, he notes that the criticism may well be overblown. "If the media had had as much deleterious impact as many critics of the media think," he quips, "we'd all be finished."

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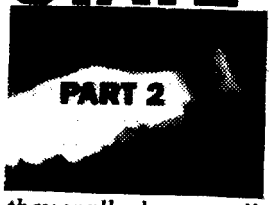
UNMASKING TERRORISM

STATE-SPONSORED TERRORISM



Rome

What he remembered later was the way their eyes glittered. And how, when they came into the slanting winter sunlight in the terminal at Rome's Leonardo da Vinci Airport from the automobile ramp outside, they walked unusually close together.

There were four of them, wearing long coats and scarfs pulled up nearly to their eyes. Amazing, he thought to himself later, that no one noticed them.

Later he learned they had also been high on drugs.

He was standing at a Trans World Airlines station next to the El Al Israel Airlines counter, waiting for a flight to Washington.

"I turned and saw them," recalls the American archaeology professor, a resident of Rome who prefers not to be named. "Then I turned back and was in conversation with one of the people I was in line with.

"The next thing we knew, we heard the sound of [grenades and] firing, and fortunately my companions and I hit the floor."

From where he lay, he could see the airport security forces returning fire — plainclothes men who suddenly produced long-barreled revolvers and, to identify themselves to one another, little paper hats. When it was over, he recalls, "there were a lot of shell casings on us and around us." One of the terrorists was 10 feet away.

The event described took place on the morning of Dec. 27, 1985 — the date of one of the most chilling incidents of international terrorism in recent years. Within minutes of each other, gunmen hurled grenades and opened fire at El Al counters in Rome and at Vienna's Schwechat Airport. Fourteen bystanders and four terrorists were killed at the two locations.

Who did it, and why?

In the days following, some of the possible motives began to grow clearer. A previously unknown group called the "Martyrs of Palestine" said the attacks were in retaliation for the Israeli bombing of the headquarters of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in Tunisia last October. Western intelligence experts, however, pinned the blame on the notorious Abu Nidal group, a breakaway PLO faction, whose motives may have included a desire to embarrass PLO leader Yasser Arafat.

Whatever the intricacies of motivation, always a complex subject when analyzing the political affairs of the Middle East, one thing soon became clear: These Palestinian gunmen were not acting on their own. Behind their attacks lay a web of state sponsorship involving a number of countries.

Investigation of the airport attacks has revealed:

- The two attacks were probably masterminded in Libya, where Abu Nidal is thought to live now. Two days after the incidents, Libya described the operation as "heroic."
- The attackers made use of several Tunisian passports that had been confiscated from workers expelled from Libya earlier in the year. These passports were then probably turned over to the terrorists by Libyan authorities.
- The terrorists were trained in Iran and came to Europe through Syria, according to Italian police intelligence specialists.
- The gunmen used AKM assault rifles (a modern version of the Soviet Kalashnikov) manufactured less than a year before they were used and all traceable to the same serial number block from a Romanian factory, according to United States sources.

The nature of state support

How significant is state sponsorship — the organized support of independent terrorist organizations by governments?

That question was put to dozens of government officials, intelligence analysts, police and military officers, and antiterrorism specialists from a number of countries in the last few months. Their answers provide some revealing insights.

State sponsorship is rapidly gaining recognition as a major item — maybe *the* major item — on today's antiterrorism agenda.

"International terrorism," Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Director William J. Casey told a conference at Tufts University in 1985, "is inconceivable apart from the financial support, military training, and sanctuary provided to terrorists by certain states."

"Without states, [terrorist] groups couldn't maintain themselves," says Prof. Yehezkel Dror of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. "They would be unpleasant but not very harmful without state support."

There is broad agreement that the list of worst offenders includes the Soviet Union and its East European satellites; the three major Middle East players (Iran, Syria, and Libya); and, to a lesser extent, Iraq, North Korea, South Yemen, Cuba, and Nicaragua.

There is, however, substantial divergence of opinion about the relative importance of states that support terrorism. Some European governments tend to play down the Soviet hand, while many US experts see it as significant. Many Europeans, and some Americans, feel that the US has overemphazed Libya's importance and boosted Col. Muammar Qaddaffi's image among Arab nations as a "Yank-buster."

Many agree, however, that Middle Eastern sponsorship of terrorism poses the most immediate threat: Of the 184 incidents of terrorism in Western Europe recorded by the US State Department for 1985, about 40 percent were related to Middle East groups or countries.

State sponsorship takes many forms. It may come as direct financial aid, allowing some terrorist leaders to live in posh North African seaside villas, travel to fancy hotels, and even maintain retirement funds.

Other assistance includes training for young recruits in weaponry, explosives, methods of assassination, paramilitary tactics, and intelligence gathering and analysis.

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